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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION; IMPLICATIONS OF CHAVEZ DEFEAT; IRAN;
US-ARGENTINE TIES; 12/05/07

11. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Today's major international stories cover implications of Venezuelan Hugo Chavez's defeat in last Sunday's elections; US President Bush insisting that Iran remains a threat despite an intelligence assessment that it had halted a nuclear program; and the USG sending Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao to the Argentine Presidential

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inauguration.

Leading "Clarín" headlines "Bush sends a second-ranking member of his administration" and highlights that "this shows that Argentina does not appear among the current USG's top priorities - (Secretary of Labor Elaine) Chao is not included in the group of the most influential members of the Bush administration."

12. OPINION PIECES AND EDITORIALS

- "Chavez's defeat will have a strong regional impact"

Dolores Tereso, on special assignment in Caracas for daily-of-record "La Nación," comments (12/05) "President Hugo Chavez's historic defeat last Sunday will not pass unnoticed in Latin America.

"In addition to setting a limit on his ambitions of absolute power in Venezuela, the president's electoral defeat represents a tough retreat for his ambitions of regional leadership and the export of his socialist revolution. And it could strengthen the so-called moderate left wing in the hemisphere, which is led by Chilean Michelle Bachelet and Uruguayan Tabare Vazquez.

"Chavez's allied governments in Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua took note of the Venezuelans' rejection of a revolutionary ambition that is similar to those they are promoting in their own countries..."

"... The electoral defeat also implies the rejection of one of the most controversial proposals of Chavez's foreign policy - support for 'alternative movements' (opposition groups in countries that are allies of Washington), a policy that will not have judicial basis."

- "Consequences of Chavez's defeat"

Ricardo Kirschbaum, leading "Clarín's" general editor, writes (12/05) "US analysts in Washington are partly explaining the 'No' in Venezuela based on the policy implemented by Tom Shannon, the US Department of State official in charge of Latin American issues. They say that a less aggressive posture, as opposed to the one Bush previously had, based on the advice of 'hawks' like Roger Noriega, facilitated some disagreement in Chavism that contributed to the Venezuelan leader's defeat."

"However, Chavez was not defeated by US strategy but by the sum of his own mistakes in his attempt to polarize the election to the extreme... Of course, the defeat of the Venezuelan leader brought some relief to the region. Being objectively weaker, Chavez's political action will be, by necessity, more moderate.

"There is another possible interpretation. Reelection processes are being rejected in the region... In Bolivia, one day before Chavez's defeat, VP Garcia Linera had announced that re-election objective would be subject to a separate referendum. The attempt to open communication channels with moderate sectors of the opposition is a road that Morales is aware of although he is not sure to choose it."

- "Bush insists on Iran - 'Iran was dangerous, Iran is dangerous, and Iran will be dangerous'"

Ana Baron, leading "Clarín's" Washington-based correspondent, writes (12/05) "All options remain on the table, including military action. In spite of the fact that the US intelligence community revealed that the Iranian government abandoned its nuclear program in 2003, George W. Bush said yesterday he would not change his policy on Iran.

"... However, the fact that Iran neither owns nor is manufacturing nuclear weapons is a huge retreat for the military option proposed by Washington hawks and it is a blow to the decision to toughen sanctions against Tehran, as proposed by Bush. On the contrary, it favors the posture of all those who have signaled the need that the White House sits to hold direct negotiations with the Iranian government."

- "Bush sends US Secretary of Labor to Argentina's presidential inauguration"

Hugo Alconada Mon, Washington-based correspondent for daily-of-record "La Nación," writes (12/05) "For one woman, another woman... The White House announced that Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao will lead the US delegation attending Cristina Kirchner's presidential inauguration next Monday.

"The Bush administration avoided any details on the 'presidential delegation,' and it just informed that US Ambassador Earl Anthony Wayne will also attend the ceremony..."

"Tom Shannon, the USG's direct liaison to Latin America, will attend Bordon's farewell although he will stay in this capital city during Cristina Kirchner's presidential inauguration just like the members of Bush's Cabinet having most direct ties to the hemisphere..."

"Argentine diplomatic sources interpreted Chao's election as a 'gesture' of good will since it will be a woman attending to the presidential inauguration of another woman in the context of a bilateral relationship that went through some ups and downs during the latest four-and-a-half years."

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